



The How-To of the OLA Circle

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Understanding the Circle

The most difficult part about developing the ability to guide the circle is taking the first step into the unknown. Ambiguity can be difficult to embrace in a classroom setting. Remember to not only be patient with your students, but with yourself as well.



Mistakes guide you as the teacher. Be willing to accept and encourage mistakes. Only through their production can you see what they are struggling with and focus on that. You see what is needed, practice it, and then back it up with an organic situation that allows your students to use, practice and produce language.



If the language is organically produced, and you guide comprehension, then your students are acquiring the concept and developing the language skills instead of simply “covering” material.



Keep in mind that every student is learning, even the ones you think don't care. They are surrounded with so much comprehensible, relevant input, that they can't avoid being engaged and having to participate. At the very least, they are inundated with the target language.



Whether as a whole group, in small groups, or one-on-one, the circle is most effective when IMMEDIACY is a focus.

Immediate responses

Immediate purpose

Immediate meaning

The best comprehension and production is achieved when in context.



Second Language Acquisition Research

'A key concept in post structural theories is that meaning is not fixed, but created through social discourses and practice.' (Swain 2007)



'Bakhtin's conceptualization of language has important implications for SLA, given that language, from a Bakhtinian perspective, is seen as structured and *emergent*, and is learned through social interactions.' (Swain 2007)



The output hypothesis claims that the act of producing language (speaking or writing) constitutes...part of the process of second language learning. (Swain 2007)

This means that the dialogue learners engage in takes on new significance. In it, we can observe learners operating on linguistic data -- operations that move inward to become part of the participants own mental activity. In dialogue with others, we see learning taking place.

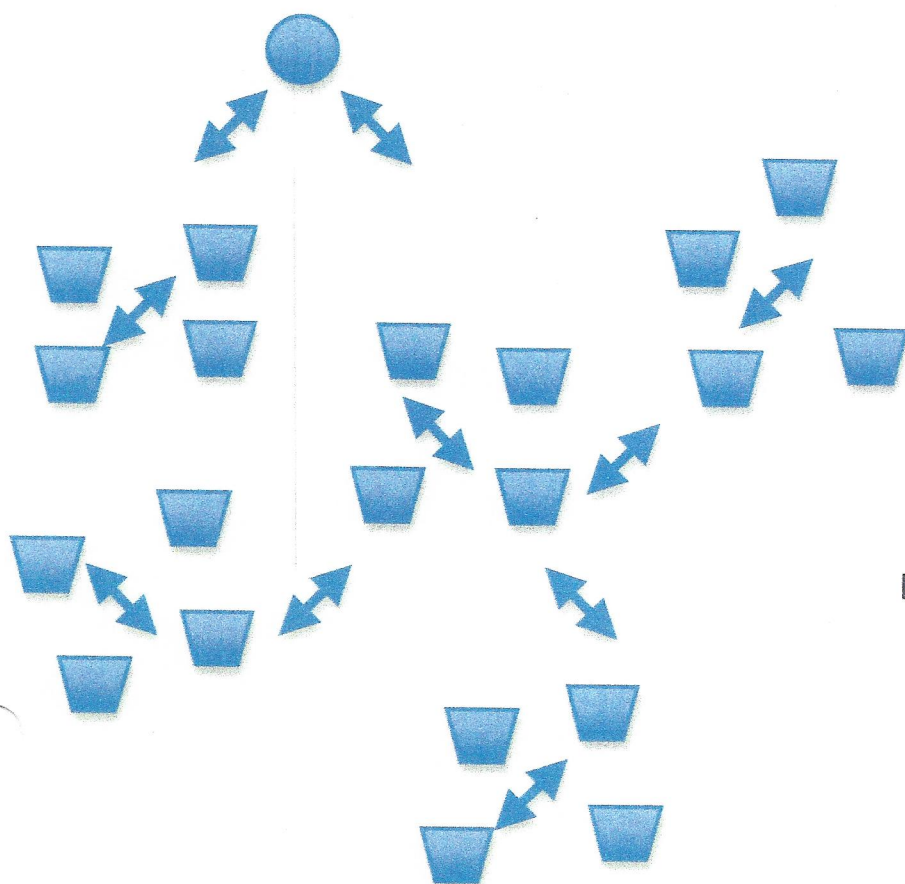
(Donato & Lantolf 1990; Lantolf 2000a; Swain 2001).



'The key to understanding language in context is to start not with the language but with context....and then to systematically relate the two.' (Housen 2011)



MODEL 2



CONS:

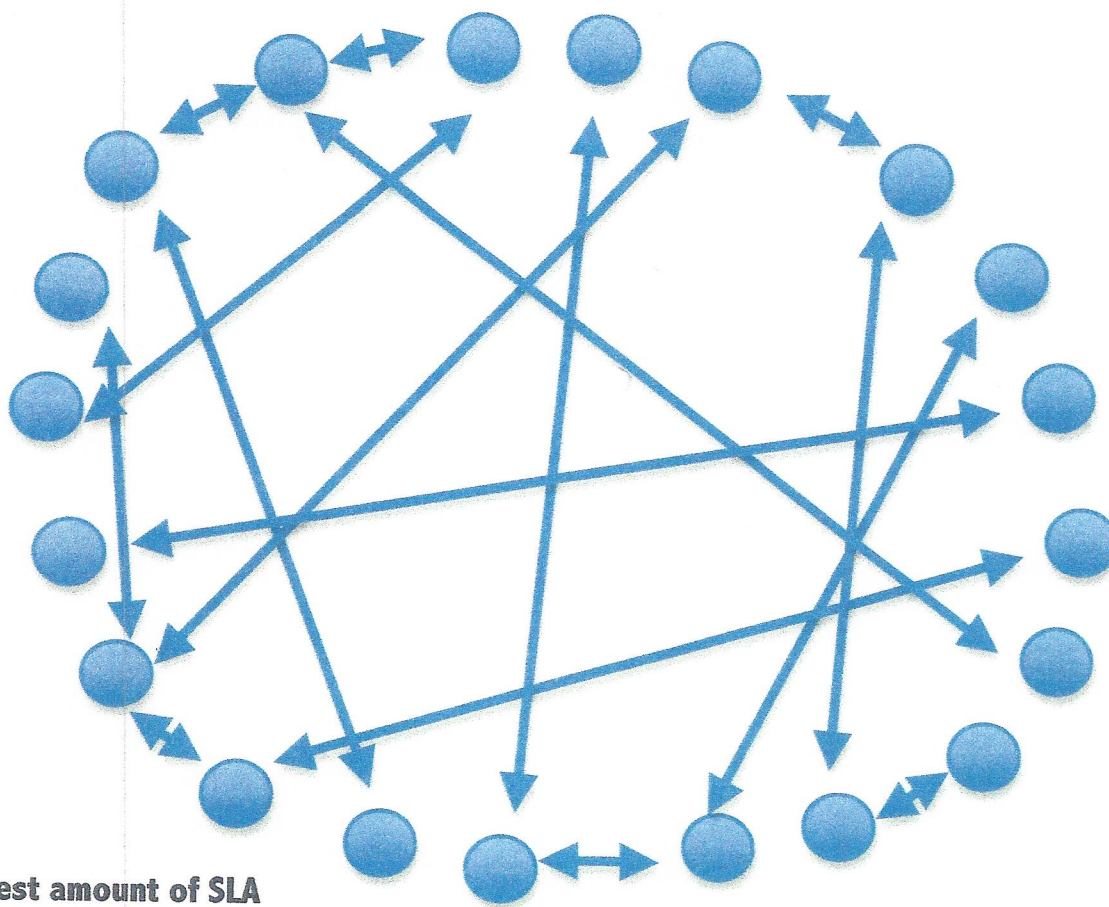
- Not as effective for lower levels since will revert to English (NH and below or IL with too much time or not structured enough activity)
- More English talking, even at higher levels, if culture & expectations have not been established
- Not as effective with mixed groups at times if students feel uncomfortable or intimidated
- Can be difficult if students have not been trained for group work

PROS:

- Interactive – more opportunities to talk due to small groups
- Easier managed – more ‘controlled’ behavior
- More possibilities for a ‘classroom of inquiry’ & small group discussions / *working together to solve something is the best way to learn and bond*
- Group work
- Effective with IL (in small doses) and above



MODEL 3



PROS:

- Highest amount of SLA
- Community
- Equity – everyone on equal footing
- Teacher as coach/guide – student as learner/worker
- Accountable to each other – no hiding
- ALL students involved ALL of the time - all learning together
- Depth over breadth
- Getting vocab & grammar base
- Most closely models how actually LEARN & ACQUIRE a language – hearing it & using it authentically
- ACTIVE, kinesthetic – promotes muscle memory & participation
- Students learn social behavior that will make them better citizens

CONS:

- New structure for students – training needed
- New structure & concept for teachers. High teacher learning curve – training needed.
- Energy
- Planning is different
- New strategies & techniques
- Students need training in appropriate social behaviors



Establishing the Environment

The goal is to create a space for STUDENTS TO PRODUCE- to speak, read and write with other students.

The students need to know it is a safe environment where risk-taking is encouraged and applauded.

The teacher is the GUIDE. It is the teacher's responsibility to establish and maintain the structure while allowing the students to steer and push the "curriculum".

The teacher is ultimately in charge of the atmosphere of the room; the teacher encourages and teaches appropriate, positive, and helpful behaviors. If these behaviors are not happening, it is up to the teacher to address it and create an effective and respectful environment

Know that it can take one class less than a week to "click", while it can take others months to establish the productive environment we are all striving for in our classrooms.

Trust, Decency and Cultural Expectations

Specific training on:

- Appropriate group work behavior
- How to talk to one another
- Appropriate body language
- Respectful behavior when someone is speaking
- How to have a voice
- Self- accountability & group accountability
- What it looks means to be respectfully participating (physical actions)
- Giving your best effort always- no matter what

Remember that building a community does not always mean just playing games- you need to create a social and academic classroom where students respect and trust each other. DO NOT BUDGE if you witness a lack of respect. The safer the environment, the quicker and more naturally language acquisition will occur.

Responsibility of learner

- BE accountable to the whole class
- Be positive and helpful
- Participate fully
- Be prepared every day
- **Stay in Spanish**
- **Be interested and passionate**





Trust Activity

In groups (4), each receives a large paper. They have 5 minutes to talk about and write down the answers to the following questions:

- What is trust to you?
- What is respect?
- What does trust look like (in life, in class?)
- How do you break trust (in life, in class?)

Each group shares out things from their list- **below is a sample of responses from a high school class:**

What is Trust?

- Able to be yourself & comfortable
- Having Respect
- Feeling Safe
- Honesty
- Constructive Criticism
- Relying on someone
- Knowing that you aren't being judged

What is Respect?

- Caring & Sharing
- Admiring qualities
- Controlling your judgment
- Listening
- Putting yourself out there
- Seeing someone's point of view
- Putting yourself in their shoes
- Being empathetic

What does trust look like?

- Cooperation
- Communication
- Being able to lean on each other in times of need
- Efficiency
- Showing appreciation
- Love
- Dependence
- Making good choices
- Positive attitude

How do you break trust?

- Cheating
- Lying
- Anything that creates fear for another person
- Making fun of/pointing at/laughing at/ demeaning someone
- Negativity
- Being dishonest with yourself
- Hating someone

Moderated Discussion:

What is it going to take to get to a "Trust- 10" in this class? (1 is not trusting anyone at all and 10 is trusting someone completely)



Student Check for Understanding the Circle

1. What are some things that you can do so that I know that you don't understand something in class?
2. What are some options you have to get help?
3. What are two personal goals you can set for yourself for this year in regards to language learning?
 - A.
 - B.
4. What are two goals you can set in regards to the class environment and your learning habits?
 - A.
 - B.
5. What can you contribute to the class? (Any special talents, passions, goals. etc....)



The Physical Structure

It is important to remember that as energetic and ambiguous as an OLA classroom can become, the circle remains the guiding structure at all times.

The purpose of the structure of the circle is:

1. Accountability
2. No hiding
3. Eliminates the front and back of the room
4. Builds community
5. Provides flexibility of movement and activities
6. Demands total student engagement

Do the students ever sit down?

Students can sit down when they are involved in writing or reading activity. Some teachers choose to have tables and chairs that border their room for these activities. Many students choose to sit down on the floor to write after they get used to the untraditional structure and physical layout of the classroom.

Tips:

Keep the circle tight- the tighter the circle, the more control you will have. If you feel like you are losing control, do a quick transition, like “Jump forward three times”.

Know what sub-structures you are putting in place, ambiguity can cause confusion if you yourself get lost. Until you get the hang of it plan your transitions and groupings ahead of time.

The lower the age level (physical activities on the floor) and the higher the proficiency level (longer small group or partner work), the more time spent sitting down.



Pairings & Groupings

The frequent mixing up of students creates authentic situations where students are forced to use language in different ways for MEANING.

Groupings by language level

Recommended activities and time limits by type of language:

NM: Short, specific questions (10-30 seconds)

NH: Longer, more open-ended questions and/or topics (1-2 min)

IL: Open-ended topics / Essential questions (3-7 min)

IM: Solving situations together / role plays / (5 min and up)

Other physical structure options

- Circle
- Double circles
- Two circles
- Four circles
- Two lines
- Four lines (or 6-8, depending on size of class)
- Double circles with people in the middle
- Fishbowl
 - A certain number of people are in the middle, and the others listen, take notes, etc.
- Smoosh!!!
 - Groups of 2, 3, 4, 5, etc.
 - Variation: Assign different tasks to each number (for ex - 2 people: jump into each other's arms, 3 people: 2 people are zombies who eat the other person, 4 people: 2 people are pirates who make 2 other people (prisoners) walk the plank)

Tips

Limit or extend the amount of time in groups, dependent on the level.

Have a clear focus and purpose.

Be aware of language level and purpose of the activity.

Be aware of age group.

Be aware and pay attention of how long they are actually staying in the L2

Always challenge your students to stay longer in the L2



Top Ten Tips for Guiding the Circle

1. Recycling the vocabulary from earlier in conversations
2. Combining the list of vocabulary from the day
3. Develop an effective system to remember vocabulary from the day
4. Using sayings, activities, games, movement for transitions
5. Listening to what the students say
6. Following new 'threads' from what comes up
7. Asking questions to further conversation
8. Clarifying ('correcting') by focusing on meaning
9. Grouping students in different ways to use the language in context
10. Keep it engaging and fun



Elements of Guiding the Circle

Below are the tools used by the teacher to create and sustain a 100% L2 environment where students are producing, acquiring and guiding the 'curriculum'.

Positive Reinforcement

- ❖ ¡Aplauso!
 - Welcoming them to the class (First day, good morning, afternoon)
 - Give students a round of applause after offering a comment, doing an presentation, struggling through describing something and getting the meaning across, for support and encouragement.

Transitions

- ❖ Physical movement
- ❖ Using vocabulary to illicit movement
- ❖ Games
- ❖ Having one guiding question lead in to the next activity

Gesturing

- ❖ Point to another student, use as example
 - Johnny- ¿El o ella? (he or she) → él (he)
 - Sam- ¿Chica o chico? (girl or boy) → chica (girl)
 - Stephanie- ¿Camisa roja o amarilla? (red or yellow shirt) → rosa (pink)
 - George- ¿Bajo o alto? (short or tall) → alto (tall)
- ❖ Using actions to describe vocabulary or get your point across
- ❖ 'Telling stories' through miming
- ❖ Establishing meaning for vocabulary



Describing

- ❖ ¿Qué es _____? (What is _____?)
- ❖ ¿Qué es un/a _____? (What is a _____?)
 - Que es una rana? (What is a frog?)
 - Es verde, pequeña, salta, vive en los lagos, un animal, come moscas (It's green, small, jumps. lives in lakes, an animal, eats flies)
- ❖ Describe un/a _____. (Describe a _____)
 - Describe una rana. (Describe a frog)
 - Es verde, pequeño, salta, vive en los lagos, un animal, como mosca

Demanding Accountability

- ❖ Warm Demander
- ❖ Students must participate
- ❖ Not allowing the L1. Immediate action if used
 - Students must use one of the three techniques to explain (act, draw or use the L2 to explain)
- ❖ Always pushing for the next level up
 - NM – NH (beginning to recombine)
 - NH – IL (Frases completas)
- ❖ Clarifying meaning when speaking
 - Students says: Él bailas (He you dance) / teacher acts confused and clarifies through meaning (¿Él baila o tú bailas? Does he dance or do you dance?)
- ❖ ¡Inténtalo! Just try or attempt to say in Spanish what you are trying to say.
- ❖ Reporting back
 - Come back from small groups and report out to whole group
 - ¿Quién habló con _____? (Who talked with _____?)
 - ¿Qué dijo tu pareja? (What did your partner say?)
 - ¿Describe el relato de _____? (Describe the story of _____)

Survey/Polling

- ❖ Surveying or polling the class
- ❖ ¿Clase, (question)?
 - ¿Clase, técnicamente, blanco es un color? (Class, technically, is white a color?)
 - ¿Clase, cuántas personas les gustan nadar? (How many people like to swim?)



- ❖ ¿Cuántas personas tienen/ no tienen/ prefieren/ les gustan/ no les gustan/ creen que/ no creen que/ están de acuerdo/ no están de acuerdo/ piensan que/ no piensan que _____? (How many people have / don't have / prefer / like / don't like / believe that / don't believe that / agree with / disagree with / think that / don't think that _____?)
 - ¿Cuántas personas piensan que rock es el mejor tipo de música? (How many people think that rock is the best kind of music?)

Stating Opinion and Defending

- ❖ Ask a question to whole class. Students share out or talk in groups.
- ❖ Students must explain not only their opinion, but why, with proof.
- ❖ When students answer by raising their hand, ask them to defend their response
 - Leading questions: ¿Cuántas personas piensan que rock es el mejor tipo de música? (How many people think that rock is the best type of music?)
 - ¿Por qué? (Why?)
 - Porque la música rock puede expresar mucha emoción. (Because rock music can express a lot of emotion.)
 - Seth, ¿tú estás de acuerdo? (Seth, do you agree?)

Actions

- ❖ New vocabulary
 - Pull out interesting, fun, comical or important word or phrase
 - ¿Qué es una acción para _____? (What is an action for _____?)
 - ¿Qué es una acción para ballena? (What is an action for whale?)
 - Accion =
 - Buy—eehh---na... (overexaggerated pronunciation with an action)
 - Change your voice to fit the word
 - Use facial expressions
 - Use your whole body
 - Students invent the action
 - Some classes use slightly different actions (ej. enviar - send)
 - There is more retention of more vocabulary because it is meaningful and a total physical response, also relies on muscle memory.
 - Repeat _____, and do the action
 - Add a story to go along with the word



Vocabulary

- ❖ Recycle new vocabulary multiple times throughout the circle time/period
- ❖ At random times, go through the vocabulary list
- ❖ Add on new words and sayings throughout class.
- ❖ Start with a few words and end up with a handful by end of day. Below is a sample of a progression of new vocabulary and expressions being added on throughout the day.
 - Ballena, perro, elefante, gato (whale, dog, elephant, cat)
 - Include sayings to the vocabulary list: ballena, perro, llama, elefante, gato, jirafa, increíble! Ay dios mio! Lengua (whale, dog, llama, elephant, cat, giraffe, That's incredible!, Oh my gosh!, tongue)
 - Que asco, competencia, yo tambien, yo tampoco, piso, techo, pecho, piscina, el lago
 - Repiten ballena, perro, llama, escupir, elefante, gato, rana, jirafa, dios mio, increíble, por supuesto, lengua, piel, respirar, que asco, competencia, piso, techo, pecho, yo también, yo tampoco, huele, propina,
 - Increíble, lengua, piel, respirar, que asco, competencia, yo tambien, yo tampoco, por supuesto, cara, huele, propina, engordar, vale la pena, ballena, perro, llama, escupir, elefante, rana, jirafa, cuidar al niños, tomar clases, mirar los deportes, malgastar el tiempo, relajar, acampar,
- ❖ Teaching certain elements of language in the moment.
 - For example: directions: arriba de, debajo de, abajo de, enfrente de, atrás de, a la izquierda, a la derecha, entre de, afuera de, cerca de, lejos de (exageración), encima de (above, below, etc..)

Questions

- ❖ Can be simple polling questions
 - How many of you want to see the new movie out?
 - ¿Qué es tu animal favorito? (What's your favorite movie?)
- ❖ Can be comparison questions
 - ¿Qué es la diferencia entre _____ y _____? (What is the difference between _____ and _____?)
- ❖ Can be deeper essential questions for the day or for the moment.
 - What do you think about the presidential campaigns?
 - What's the solution to poverty?
 - What would you do if _____?



Movement

- ❖ Manos arriba (hands up!)
- ❖ Running - The whole circle runs around
- ❖ Jumping
 - ¡1, 2, 3 salten!! (1, 2, 3, jump!)
 - ¿Cuántas personas pueden tocar el techo? (How many people can touch the ceiling?)
- ❖ Make up rhymes that can be remembered easily: “Piso, techo, pecho”
- ❖ Touch parts of the body
 - Agarran brazos, rodilla con dedo, etc. (Grab arms, knees with your finger, etc.)
 - Move to another place grabbing the arm of your partner

Spelling

- ❖ ¿Cómo se escribe? (How do you write __?)
- ❖ Se escribe _____ (It's written ____)
- ❖ ¿Se escribe jirafa con un j o g? (Is giraffe spelled with a j or a g?)

Made up or Real

- ❖ When students are talking it can be invented/fictional or real/from their daily life
- ❖ As long as they are talking, “No me importa.” (it doesn't matter!)

Grouping Students

- ❖ Constantly grouping students together to carry on conversations.
- ❖ Grouping can be done:
 - Random, by chance
 - ¿Cuántas personas hay en clase hoy? (How many people in class?)
 - Students count their classmates and report back to teacher
 - Count off the students
 - In groups of 2, 3, etc.
 - Tú con ella (name), tú con él (name) (directly point at them – you with her, you with him, etc.)
 - Ustedes dos (point-signal) (You two)
 - Students make eye contact with ea/o and move to that person
 - Make one side of the circle move to their partner, direct or signal them to move



Conversations

- ❖ “Hablan un poco sobre _____.” (Talk a bit about _____)
- ❖ Hablan un poco sobre tu verano, fin de semana, vacación, etc. (Talk a bit about your summer, weekend, vacation, etc). Samples of different leading questions:
 - ¿Qué haces/hiciste? (What did you do?)
 - ¿A dónde vas/fuiste? (Where did you go?)
 - ¿Trabajas? ¿Dónde? ¿Qué haces? ¿Te gusta? (Do you work? Where? What do you do? Do you like it?)
 - ¿Duermes mucho normalmente? (Do you normally sleep a lot?)
 - ¿Qué comes? (What do you eat?) / ¿Con quién? (With who?)
 - ¿Cuáles actividades haces? (What activities do you do?)
 - ¿Qué haces con tus amigos? (What do you do with your friends?)
- ❖ For 3, 4, 5 minutos
 - Make the time appropriate for the language level and task.
 - Trick: Tell them the time, but let them talk for as long as they will go naturally and give time updates: “Un minuto mas.” (one more minute!)
- ❖ Monitoring
 - Circling around, checking in with different groups *quickly*, getting them to further their conversations, asking a quick question, keep students in the L2, keep them engaged
 - Make sure you are constantly aware of what kind of language you are hearing and when they are ready to move on.
 - This can inform your next ‘lesson’ or ‘focus’.
 - Take notes

Error Correction

- ❖ When a student asks a question or says something ‘incorrect’, be positive and encouraging. Listen for meaning and comprehension.
- ❖ Pose question to whole class.
 - “¿Clase, ellos son o ellos tienen ____ años?” (Class, they are or they have ____ years?)
 - Common phrases
 - ¿Qué es la diferencia entre cuidar niños y mirar niños? (What is the difference between take care of and watch kids?)
 - Confusion of meaning
 - ¿chico o chica? (girl or boy?) → chica (point to Samantha)
 - ¿ella hablo o ella habla? (She I talk or she talks?)



Movement in the Circle

These are activities or movements designed to break down the filter and facilitate students speaking with different partners and/or groups. The goal is that students end up in different positions in a fun way.

Transitions

- Step in front, step in back
- Shake hands, change position
- Lock arms, change position
- Boys or girls in the middle (could do it by color of clothes, birthdays, etc.)
- Jump to the left or right, or grab arms and jump across the circle.
- Two people change positions by jumping (one in front, the other back)
- Everyone moves to a new position in the circle. (need a new person on each side)
- Changing kids position by color, or clothes, or birthday, or favorite activity, etc.
- Line up by height, hair color, boy/girl etc.
- Having kids just simply going to a different position every day so that they don't get too comfortable with the same position. 'amigos nuevos' (new friends)
- Chain reaction: grab hands, turn around and jump. Do it several times.
- Run and jump (circle game). Can also do it with animals.
- Form groups / move by things in common (birthdays, favorite colors, anything that recycles in basic vocab, favorite seasons)
- Directions (below, above, etc.)
- Vocabulary actions (old & new)
- Manos arriba (hands up!)
- Cross your arms across your chest and grab hands. Jump in different directions, do the wave, etc
- Funny things (playing off cuentos de los estudiantes, etc.)

Following/Responding to Directions

- ¿Quién está...? (Who is....?)
- Levanta la mano si... (Raise your hand if....)
- Levanta la / mueva la (body part) (Lift up or move the body part..)
- Toca la (body part) (Touch the body part) Singly or in pairs/groups
- Cambia lugares con...Change places with... (a person, someone who, a girl...)



Tricks of the Circle

- Switch feet and jump
- Switch feet while jumping forward or backward
- Bend down towards the ground, beat on the ground, beat on the knees of the neighbor – in the same position, jump forward, backward, to the side.
- Have to jump to the side and/or forwards or backwards while in the knees bent position.
- Walking, then running, then skipping, then jumping sideways, then walking, etc. as you go in a circle.
- Moving arms arriba, abajo, a la derecha, izquierda, etc.
- Derecha, izquierda con los brazos o piernas. (you shout out directions and they have to do it, but you mix it up and act out the opposite so they get 'caught')
- Body part 'shout outs' – shout out body parts quickly - nariz, orejas, cabeza, ojos, etc. – and they have to touch
- In pairs: they link arms and have to run in a circle in place. Shout out: 'in the other direction' - They keep changing directions as they're running with their arms linked (mostly you just get a good laugh out of it)
- Have students turn their bodies and jump to one side or another. Could have them touch the shoulders of the person in front, and do a 'masaje'.
- Jump forward and/or backward. (1, 2, 3 x, etc.) / Jump side to side several times and/or around the circle.
- Aplausos – applause
- Actions with the vocab. Always a good transition piece!
- Asking questions using the different pronouns as they move positions M(he, she, y'all, etc)

For Group Cohesion

- Connecting parts of the body
- Pass the clap or the shh
- Everyone sing a vowel at the same time (like the monks)
- Pass the click (clicking sound)
- Pass the tap (tap someone on the shoulder)
- Pass the handshake (Do many of these at the same time to force them to focus more)
- Count up from 1, switch directions on certain multiples. If you miss it, you're out of the group
- Applaud in different directions (up, in middle, behind). Kids try to applaud with the person on either side of them. Cross arms and try again. (1x, 2x, 3x)
- Asesino (the game 'assassin')
- Pato, pato, ganzo (with or without questioning) – duck, duck, goose.



Chants

For those of you with that class that just won't quiet down...
Make a chant, and I repeat it over & over again every time you hear the native language:

You can hold up my fingers and say,

Clase: (Class)

1. Español (Spanish)
2. No inglés (No English)
3. Cuerpo (Body)
4. No interrupciones (No interruptions)



Classroom Management at a Glance

Start by looking at *actual* behaviors and think about the *actual* causes- their behaviors are symptoms of something, what is it?

Behaviors

- Students not participating
- Students not caring
- Students being disrespectful
- Students speaking in their native language
- Students being cliquey
- Side conversations
 - -Distracting each other
- Physical presence in circle
- Disrupting the circle
 - -Talking in native language
 - -Impatient w each other

Causes

- Students don't know each other or know each other too well
- Students don't know how to work with each other
 - -Don't know how to work in groups
 - -Don't know how to talk to someone
 - Don't know how to help others
- Frustration (systems, expectations that they are not used to)
- Students don't know HOW to have a voice
- Students are not used to being involved and/or directing their own learning
- Social or individual pressure to get attention
 - Lack of value/importance for education
 - Standing, they are not physically restricted by a desk and have not been taught how to behave appropriately

Solutions

What are some community-based activities you can come up with that directly address the CAUSES of the behavior.

OLA Observation Form



How is the teacher meeting the goals?

To speak Spanish

Is the classroom kinesthetic / fun / active?

Not be afraid of a Spanish environment

Is it holding the students interest? / are students engaged?

Take risks / break down filter

To be able to infer

Is it communicative? (*Are students talking more than the teacher?*)

Participate and be part of a community

It is immersion? (*That goes BOTH ways – are **students** speaking in L2? / Are 'side conversations' & 'side comments' in L2? / Is the teacher staying in L2?*)

STRATEGIES / TECHNIQUES

Activities

Is it at level? (*adv – frases completas y extendidas / II – frsae completas / I – pushing for frases completas, etc.*)

For communication

Transitions

Recommendations / Comments
/ Ideas / Self Reflection

Movement